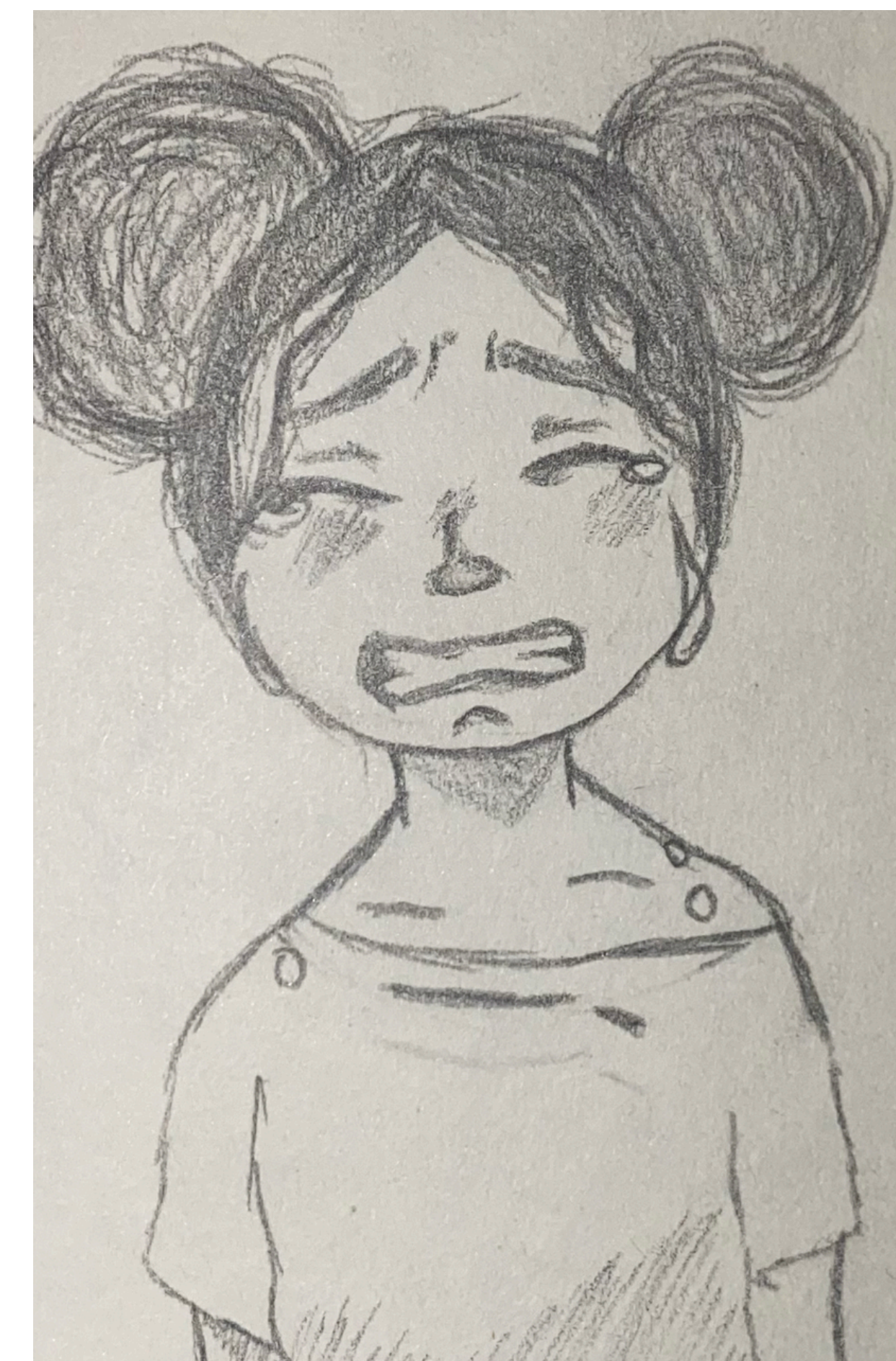
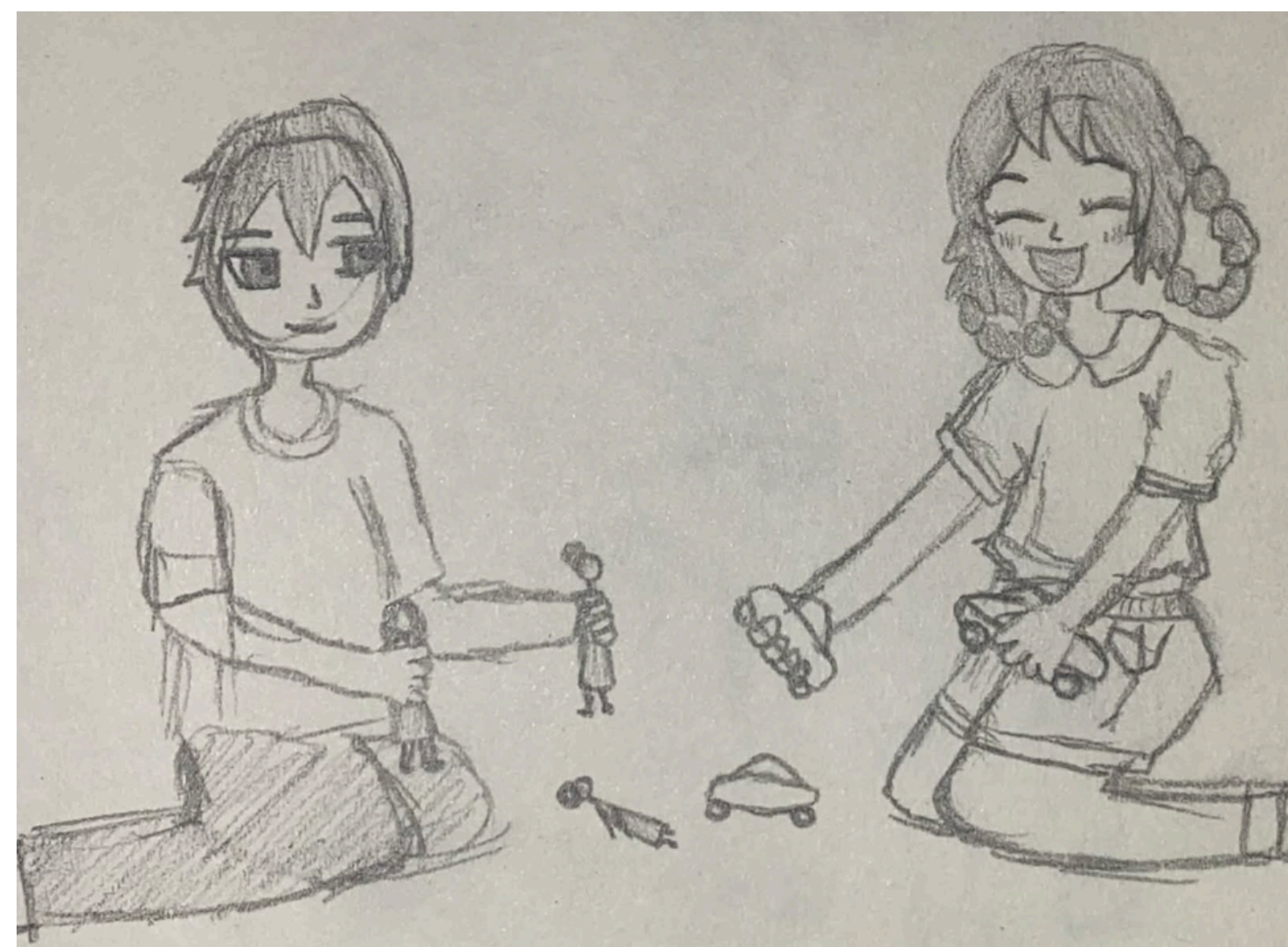


Children's Gendered Experiences of Coercive Control



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INTRODUCTION

- Coercive control (CC) is defined as intentional and harmful tactics of power and control (Stark, 2007)
- It can manifest as different forms of abuse in children's and young people's lives and may escalate to lethal violence (Stark, 2007; Katz, 2022)
- The dynamics of CC are strongly gendered: the majority of victims are women, while most perpetrators are men (Stark, 2007)
- It has significant effects on the victim's safety, mental health, and social wellbeing (Katz, 2022)
- There has been little research on children's and young people's role and experiences in the dynamics and research has centred around adult/women victims despite CC affecting both women and children and young people (Nikupeteri, Katz & Laitinen 2021; Katz, 2022)

OBJECTIVE

- Focuses on children's and young people's experiences of CC and how their experiences differ by gender
- Previous research has shown that women's experiences are gendered; perpetrators attack their femininity, motherhood and caretaking (Stark, 2007; Katz 2019)

There is a need to explore if children face similar abuse based on the perpetrator's gendered expectations

METHODOLOGY

- The data consist of teller-focused task-based interviews with children (7-12) and young people (13-17) collected in Finland (N=15) and Canada (N=12)
- 12 boys and 15 girls (all cis-gender)
- Analysis was qualitative content-oriented
- Ethical consideration included questions about safety, well-being of informants and consent

RESULTS

SHARED EXPERIENCES

Basic resources and the relationship with the other parent were controlled similarly across different genders. Age was the key exposing factor:

"If I wanted to go to the bathroom in the middle of working on something, he would ask me why am I leaving my task when I am not yet finished." (Juuso, 12)

"I had to eat the food in my room. If I needed to get more food, I would get yelled at." (Salla, 14)

"Sometimes I could not attend my football games at all, if mom was there. It was dad's time, so mom was not allowed to be there." (Eetu, 12)

GIRLS' EXPERIENCES

Girls were expected to take care of the house and their siblings:

*"And sometimes when we stayed with him [perpetrating father], he might travel and I had to cook and take care of my little siblings, I had to grow up really fast – **I was not able to be a child.**"* (Julia, 19)

"I was taking care of the dishes and laundry and vacuuming and cats (...) I made sure that [younger siblings] had clean clothes and that I also could sometimes have clean clothes on (...) I took care of the whole household." (Milla, 16)

"My mom sat me down and said, '[participant's first name], you're 10 years old, you're not the mother, it's not your job to handle that.' And I said to her, 'What do you mean? That's what Dad is asking me to do.'" (Sophie, 17)

BOYS' EXPERIENCES

Boys were expected to have masculine hobbies and to not show their emotions:

"He's been preventing me from taking classes for a long time anyway, because even before, when I was little and doing ballet, he stopped me from doing it." (Olivier, 14)

*"He [perpetrating father] always says, if I am for example crying, that **I need to man up.**"* (Harri, 16)

"I did hockey but not anymore (...). It was forced upon me by that person [father]." (Eric, 11)

DISCUSSION

- Some of the dimensions of CC were experienced similarly across genders (basic resources, the relationship with the other parent)
- Some of the dimensions were controlled differently (free time, showing of emotions, resources)
- The results highlight that professionals need to be sensitive to gender and power to protect children and young people (Knezevic et al., 2022)
- The results also challenge the conceptualization of CC as mainly a women's rights issue
- The treatment of children as primarily "witnesses" of domestic violence both by practitioners and in the human rights system ignores their gendered experiences of CC
- Future research should take into consideration LGBTQIA+ children and young people

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